

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

16-18 BATH STREET,

ABINGDON, OXFORDSHIRE

NGR SU4963097155

*On behalf of
Knight-Bowman Developments Ltd*

OCTOBER 2015

REPORT FOR Knight-Bowman Developments Ltd
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Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out an archaeological watching brief at 16-18 Bath Street, Abingdon, Oxfordshire (NGR SU4963097155). Groundwork consisted of the excavation of footings trenches and a soakaway prior to the construction of four one bed flats. No significant archaeological features or deposits were encountered; a series of medieval and post medieval cultivation soil layers were overlain by post-medieval levelling deposits and associated walls.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development site is located on the west side of Bath Street towards its south end (NGR SU4963097155). The site lies at approximately 54m AOD. The underlying geology is Kimmeridge Clay, although the site is located close to the junction with Second Terrace Gravel (BGS Sheet 253, Drift 1:50,000).

1.2 Planning Background

The Vale of White Horse District Council granted planning permission for extension of ground floor A2 office, extension to ground floor flat and alteration and change of use of first floor and second floor (A2 office and flat) to provide 2no 2-bed flats; demolition of redundant lock-up garages and erection of 4no 1-bed flats, landscaping and parking, resurfacing of access (P13/V1982/FUL) Due to the archaeological and historical importance of the surrounding area a condition was attached to the permission requiring a watching brief to be maintained during the course of building operations or construction works on the site. This was in line with NPPF and Local Planning policies.

1.3 Archaeological Background

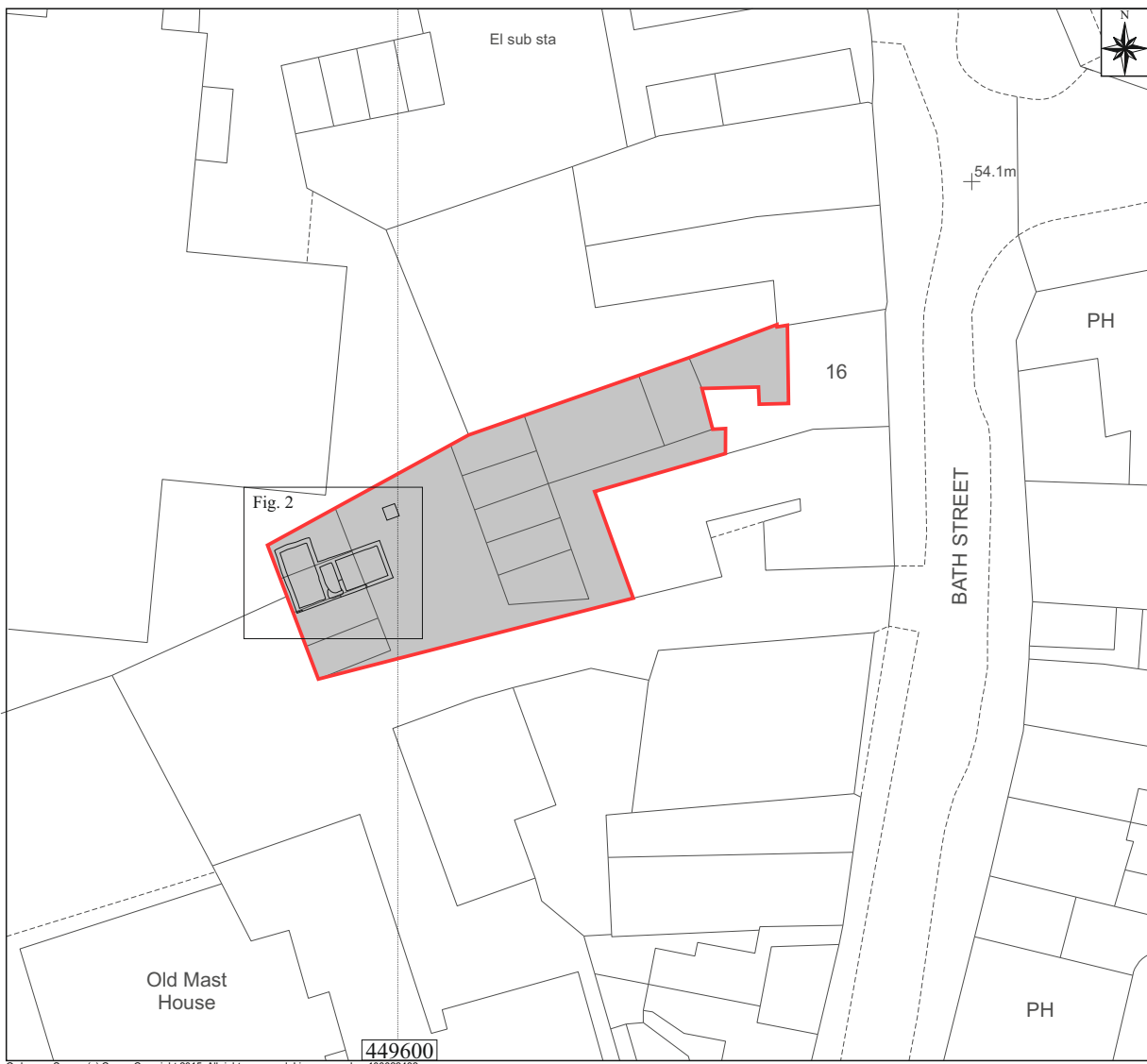
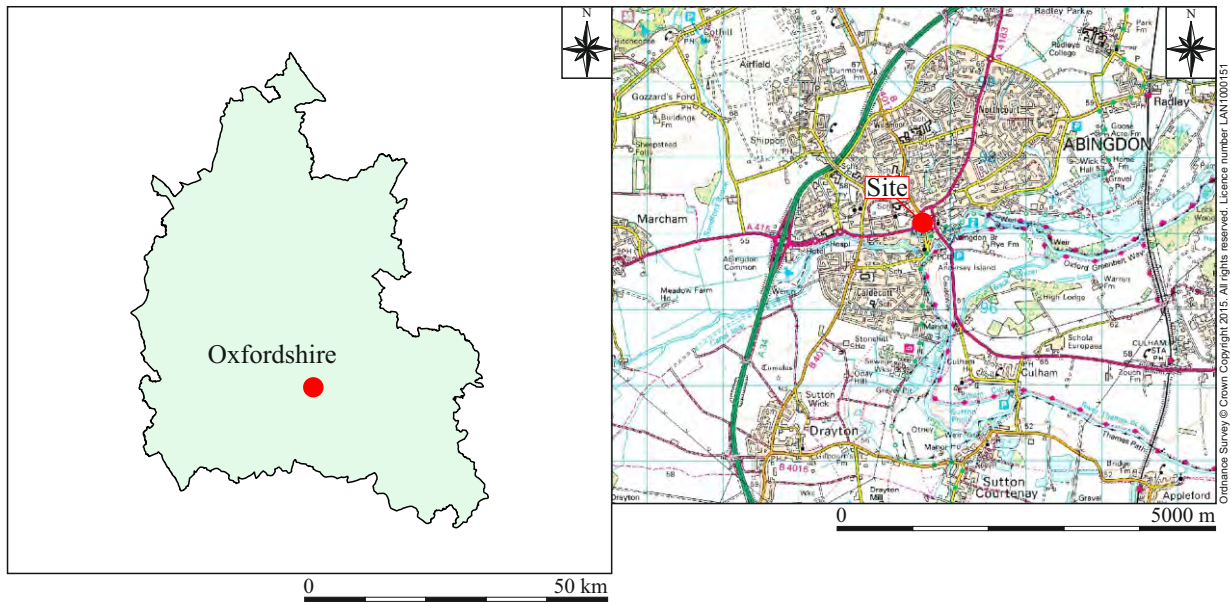
The site lies within the bounds of the later Romano British settlement just to the north of the late prehistoric defences. It is also within the medieval settlement and there is extensive evidence of domestic and light industrial activity from that period in the vicinity of the site. Part of a human skull was found immediately to the north amongst building debris that was dated from the later medieval period.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To make a record of any significant archaeological remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological remains.

In particular:



Key Site boundary Monitored area

Figure 1: Site location

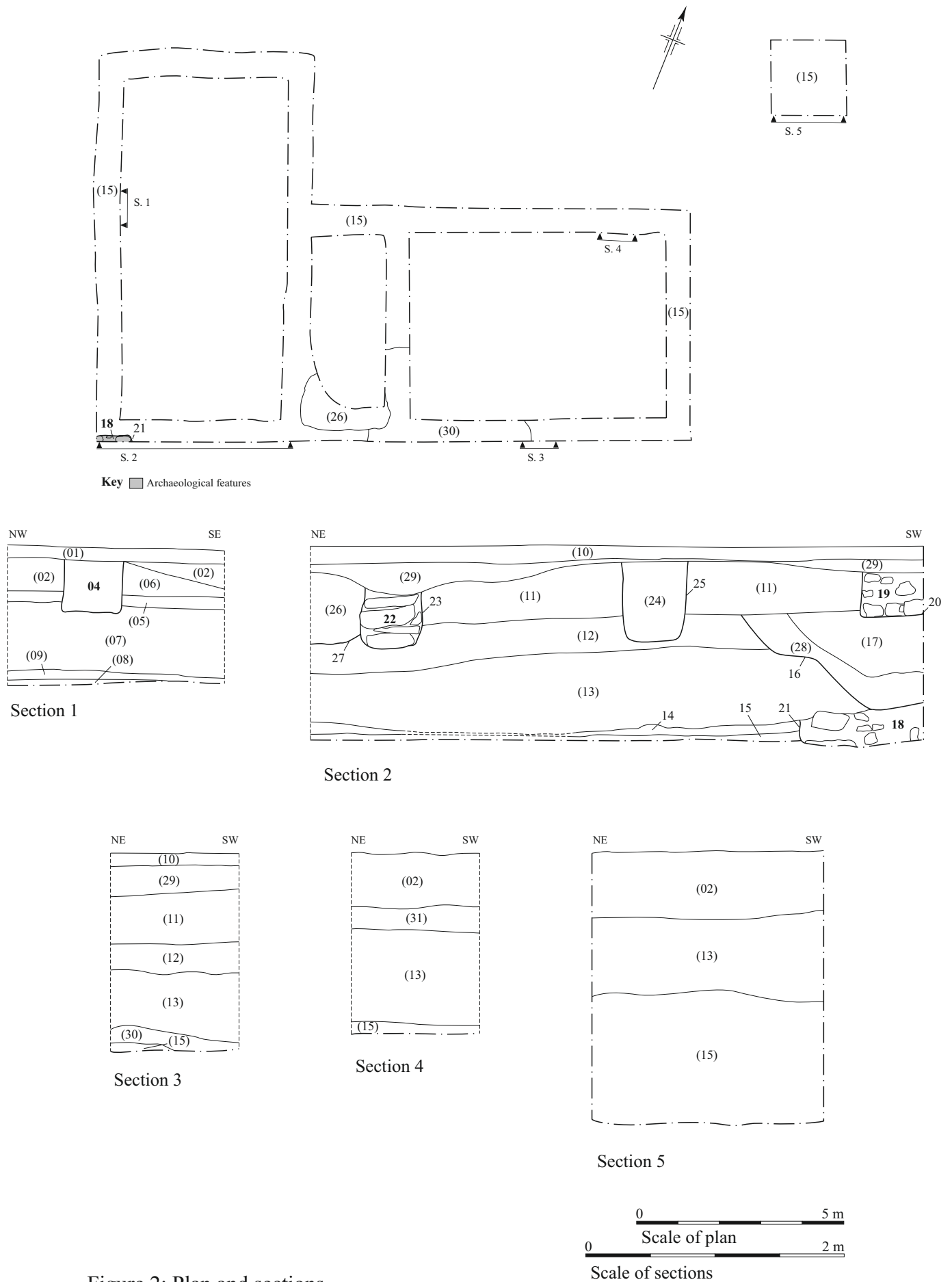


Figure 2: Plan and sections

- To record any evidence relating to the known Roman British and medieval activity in the area.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the Oxfordshire Historic and Natural Environment Team. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate and possible.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2014).

3.2 Methodology

Excavation was carried out using a 360° excavator fitted with a 0.6m toothed bucket. Where archaeological horizons were encountered they were cleaned by hand and excavated appropriately. Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and section drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was also produced.

The resultant spoil from the works was visually scanned, especially for finds relating to Romano-British and medieval activity.

4 RESULTS (Figure 2)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers without brackets indicate features i.e. pit cuts, numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material, while numbers in bold indicate structural features.

Groundwork consisted of the excavation of footings trenches and a soakaway. The footings trenches were excavated to a maximum width of 0.8m and a maximum depth of 1.4m. The soakaway measured 1.8m by 1.8m and was excavated to a depth of 2.1m.

4.1 Medieval cultivation soil

The geological horizon was not encountered during excavation; instead the lowest deposit encountered was (15) (also recorded as (09)), a soft dark brownish grey clayey silt with occasional sub-angular stone under 50mm in size (Fig. 2; Sections 1-5, and Plate 3). The deposit had a thickness of over 1.02m and was present across the whole site. One sherd of Medieval Oxford Ware was recovered from this context, providing a *terminus post quem* of late 11th century.

4.2 Possible surfaces and wall

Garden soil (15) was overlain by two discrete deposits: in the south western footings trenches (15) was overlain by (08) (also recorded as (14)), a moderately compact mid yellowish brown sandy silt with a thickness of 0.1m. This deposit was present for a length of 6m in the western most footings trench, for 5m in the southern and was visible in patches elsewhere (Fig. 2; Sections 1 and 2). In the south eastern footings trench (15) was overlain by (30), a compact mid yellowish brown fine sandy gravel, 0.12m in thickness and 3.6m in length by 2.5m in width as recorded within the trench (Fig. 2; Section 3).

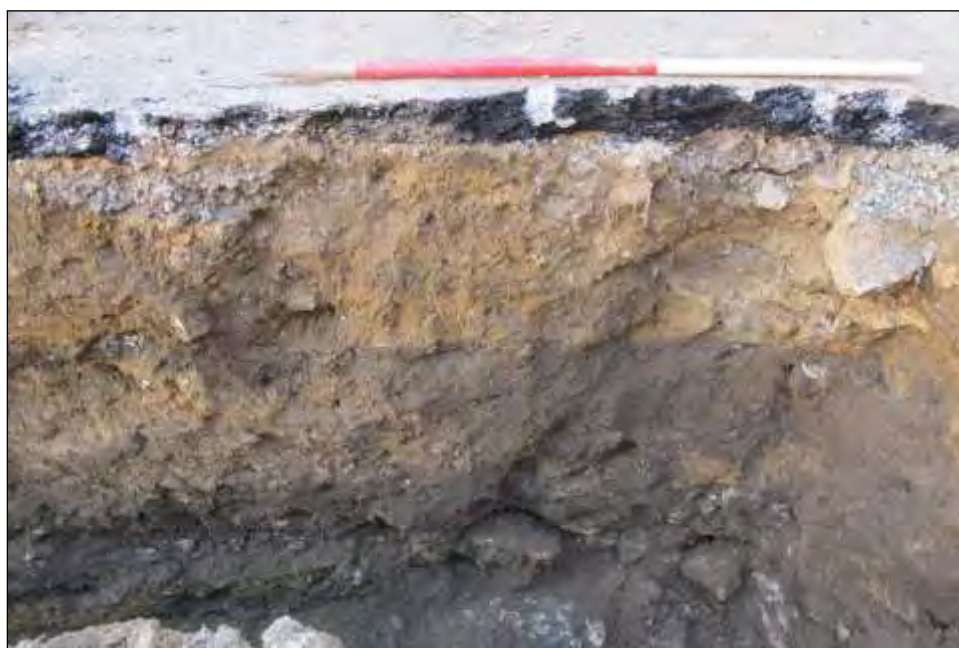


Plate 1: *Section 2, showing walls 18, 19 and pit 16, looking SE.*

In the south west corner of the footings trench (14) was truncated by possible wall **18** and associated construction cut 21. This wall was constructed from roughly hewn limestone blocks, ranging in size from 300mm x 150mm x 100mm to 100mm x 100mm x 80mm. There was no evidence of coursing and the stones were earth bonded with a mid grey clayey silt. In the trench the feature was 0.9m in length and 0.2m in width, with a height of 0.2m; the wall was present in the base of the footings trench and extended beyond the limit of excavation to the south (Fig. 2; Plan 1, Section 2 and Plate 1).

As seen in section construction cut 21 had vertical sides, with a sharp break of slope at the top of the cut. This feature was not fully excavated as it extended below the impact depth of the footings.

4.3 Post-medieval cultivation soil

Wall **18** and gravel deposit (30) were overlain by (13) (also recorded as (07)) a soft mid greyish brown clayey silt with occasional sub-angular stone under 50mm in size. The deposit had a maximum thickness of 0.62m and was present across the whole site (Fig. 2; sections 1-5). Three sherds of pottery were recovered from this context; one

sherd of Red Earthenware, one of Late Medieval Brill/Boarstall Ware and one of Westerwald Stoneware. These sherds provide a date range of 16th to late 17th century.

4.4 Post-medieval levelling deposits and associated features

The next phase of activity is represented by a sequence of post-medieval levelling deposits, ending the sites long period of cultivation. The first of these deposits was (12) a friable mid greyish brown silt with moderate sub-angular limestone under 50mm in size. This deposit was 0.36m depth and present for a length of 14m in the southern footings trench (Fig. 2; section 2).

This layer was truncated by 16; a pit cut with an unknown shape in plan, sharp break of slope at top and base of the cut, stepped moderately sloping sides and a concave base. As viewed in section the cut was 1.35m length and 0.8m in depth; the cut extended beyond the limit of excavation to the south. The feature contained two fills; the lowest fill was (28) a loose mid yellowish brown silty sand with frequent fine gravel, 0.3m in thickness. This was overlain by (17) a friable mid brownish grey silty loam, 0.52m in thickness (Fig. 2; section 2). A fragment of copper alloy buckle was recovered from this fill, providing a 17th – 19th century date.

In the southern footings trench deposit (13) was overlain by (05) a firm light orange/tarnished yellow sandy mortar with occasional charcoal flecks, 0.18m in thickness; one sherd of Red Earthenware and one sherd of Creamware were recovered from this context, providing a mid-18th century date. This in turn was overlain by (06) a firm light brownish yellow sand with frequent unsorted angular stone, 0.26m in thickness (Fig. 2; section 1).

Both (06) and pit 16 were overlain by (11) (also recorded as (02)) a layer of compact mixed mid greyish brown and yellowish brown sandy silt, 0.58m in thickness. This layer was present across the site, with the exception of the north east corner and soakaway trench.

4.5 Post-medieval features

Layer (11) was truncated by a series of features. Wall **4**, built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with dimensions of 200mm x 150mm x 100mm. The stone was randomly coursed and bonded with a light greyish yellow mortar. The wall was aligned north east – south west, ran for 14.5m in length, visible at several points within the trench, 0.46m in width and 0.5m in depth. It was built within construction cut 3, a cut with sharp break of slope at top and base, vertical sides and a flat base (Fig. 2; section 1. Plate 2).

Wall **19** was built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with dimensions of 150mm x 100mm x 100mm. The stone was randomly coursed and bonded with a light greyish yellow mortar. The wall had a depth of 0.36m and a width of 0.48m and was built within construction cut 20; a cut with sharp break of slope at top and base, vertical sides and a flat base. Wall **22** was built from roughly hewn limestone blocks with dimensions of 400mm x 150mm x 250mm to 300mm x 100mm x 200mm. The stone was randomly coursed and bonded with light brownish yellow sand. The wall had a depth of 0.5m and a width of 0.48m and was built within construction cut 23; a cut



Plate 2: *Section 1, showing wall 4, looking NE.*



Plate 3: *Section 5, showing garden soil layer (15) in soakaway trench, looking SE.*

with a sharp break of slope at top and base, vertical sides and flat base (Fig. 2; section 2). Both walls **19** and **22** were present in the southern section but did not extend further north into the trench.

Levelling deposit (11) was overlain by cut 25; a pit or post hole with a sharp break of slope at top and base, vertical sides and a flat base, 0.5m in width by 0.62m in depth. This was filled by 24, a compact mid greyish brown sand with moderate sub-angular stone under 40mm (Fig. 2; section 2).

4.6 Modern demolition and levelling

Walls **4**, **19**, **22** and pit **25** were overlain by (01) a soft mid brown sand and gravel, with frequent unsorted irregular limestone and fragmented building material. The deposit had a maximum depth of 0.52m and was present across the whole site.

This was overlain by a modern tarmac surface (10) and associated gravel bedding (29); these deposits had a maximum combined thickness of 0.39m and were predominantly removed prior to the commencement of works, with the exception of a strip along the southern edge of the site.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery

By Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 9 sherds with a total weight of 981g. It was all medieval and later, and was recorded using the conventions of the Oxfordshire County type-series (Mellor 1984; 1994), as follows:

CRM:	Creamware, mid 18 th - early 19 th C. 1 sherd, 4g.
OXBF:	North-East Wiltshire Ware, AD1050–1400. 1 sherd, 9g.
OXBX:	Late Medieval Brill/Boarstall Ware, 15 th – early 17 th century. 1 sherd, 5g.
OXDR:	Red Earthenwares, 1550+. 4 sherds, 948g.
OXST:	Westerwald Stoneware, 1590-1800. 1 sherd, 8g.
OXY:	Medieval Oxford Ware, AD1075–1350. 1 sherd, 7g.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is typical of sites in the region. All the sherds are in reasonable condition, and appear reliably stratified. The sherd of OXDR from context 13 is from the rim of an exceptionally large storage vessel.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

	OXBF		OXY		OXBX		OXDR		OXST		CRM		
Cntxt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	Date
U/S	1	9											U/S
2							2	330					17thC
5							1	11			1	4	M18thC
7					1	5			1	8			L17thC
13							1	607					17thC
15			1	7									L11thC
Total	1	9	1	7	1	5	4	948	1	8	1	4	

5.2 Building Material *By Simona Denis*

A small assemblage of seven building material fragments was recovered from three different contexts; most of the items (62%) were positively identified as plain clay roof tiles. A single stone peg tile and a single brick fragments complete the collection.

The state of preservation is generally very good, although none of the artefacts was complete. The material was recorded by context, divided by type and fabric, counted, measured and weighed.

Plain clay roof tile

Clay plain tiles were developed in the 13th century to replace shingles and thatch in the roofing of domestic buildings. Handmade peg tiles were commonly used until the 19th century, when machine-made tiles became popular, with little variation in the manufacturing technique. Also, good quality roof tiles were reused over long period of times; therefore, the potential for dating evidence of plain roof tiles remains limited. (Boniface and Redman 2015, Heritage Directory 2010)

Five roof tile fragments were found in contexts (02) and (07). Only two items were positively identified as peg tiles: one example from context (02), which preserved a complete peg hole close to the corner, and an additional fragment found in context (07), with a partial peg hole close to the side.

Four different fabrics were observed:

- Fabric 1: Dark orange, sandy with frequent very small inclusions
- Fabric 2: Orange-pink, gritty with small inclusions
- Fabric 3: Orange-pink, gritty with frequent small to medium inclusions
- Fabric 4: Orange pink with grey core, gritty

Context	Type	Fabric	Weight (gr)	Date range
02	Peg tile	2	94	13 th -19 th C
	Roof tile	1	130	
07	Peg tile	3	537	
	Roof tile	4	145	
		2	77	

Stone peg tile

A single, incomplete stone roof peg tile was found in context (09). The item, measuring 147x120 mm and weighing 390 gr, shows a complete peg hole of a diameter of 9 mm close to the preserved corner. The object remains undated.

Brick

One fragment of frogged brick, weighing 456 gr, was recovered from context (07): the fabric is dark pink, sandy with occasional medium inclusions. The object can be dated to the 19th century. (Hammond 1990, Lynch 2015).

5.3 Metal By *Simona Denis*

Nail

One fragmentary hand-wrought iron nail was collected from context (12). The item is extremely corroded and incomplete; the point is missing, resulting in the exposure of the rectangular cross-section. The object was tentatively identified as a sprig, a type of finishing nail commonly used in building construction between the 17th and the 19th centuries (Bodey 1983, Chervenka 2015, Hillman-Crouch 2015, Nelson 1968, Taylor 2015). It is not recommended to retain the item due to its poor state of preservation.

Buckle

A small fragment of buckle, measuring 31x16 mm and weighing 2 gr, was found in context (17). The object, largely incomplete and affected by verdigris, is a cast rectangular frame with rounded corners and was tentatively identified as a shoe buckle. Although no exact reference could be found due to its incompleteness, the overall aspect of the buckle suggests a dating between the 17th and the 18th century (Grillo *et al* 2014, Whitehead 2003).

6 DISCUSSION

The earliest deposit encountered was (15); this was a thick deposit of cultivation soil with a *terminus post quem* of the 11th century. This deposit was present throughout the whole site, indicating that the area was in cultivation from at least the early medieval period. The thickness of the soil may indicate cultivation occurring over an extended period of time; however it is also worth considering that the soakaway (where the deepest excavation occurred) may have been excavated within the bounds of a large feature backfilled with (15), the edges of which would have fallen beyond the limits of the trench (Fig. 2, Section 5).

The construction of wall **18** and deposition of (14) and (30) represent the end of the first phase of cultivation; (14) and (30) were thin compact deposits, present in patches across the site, and may have formed a remnant exterior surface capping cultivation soil (15) (Fig. 2, Sections 1-3). This can only be loosely dated to between the 11th to 16th centuries.

Following this phase of activity cultivation was resumed, represented by (13); this deposit was more reliably dated to the 16th to late 17th century on the basis of recovered pottery. The deposit was thick and present across the whole site, thus indicating that cultivation had resumed on the site by the early post-medieval period. This second period of cultivation was terminated by the deposition of (05), (06), (11) and (12), a series of compact levelling deposits; pottery from (05) provided a mid 18th century date.

These deposits were truncated by a series of post medieval walls; wall 4 was seen throughout the length of the footings trenches and was orientated north east – south west. This alignment indicates that the wall would continue to run toward the properties to the north. The 1874 OS town plan of Abingdon shows a large rectangular building in this position. Wall 4 may therefore represent the southern wall of this building, with the present northern boundary wall of the site forming the northern wall. No evidence of an eastern gable wall was recorded, however it is likely that this would lie further east of the footings trenches. The function of walls 19 and 22 is less clear as they did not extend into the footings trenches, however they may indicate the presence of further smaller buildings to the rear of the properties on Bath Street. This phase of the site was ended with the deposition of layer (02); a deposit that is likely to be the result of demolition of the post-medieval buildings and subsequent levelling. The last phase of activity on site consisted of the construction of a series of sheds or garages in the mid-20th century; these were demolished prior to the commencement of construction works on site and no footings were encountered during excavation.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The earliest phase of activity identified on site was cultivation soil (15), indicating that from the 11th century onwards the area may have lain within fields associated with the medieval settlement of Abingdon. A series of later soil layers indicate that cultivation continued within the area until at least the late 17th century. This period was concluded by the deposition of levelling deposits and subsequent construction of a series of buildings in the 18th century.

It is possible that further evidence of medieval activity lies beneath cultivation soil (15); any evidence of Romano-British activity, which was not recorded during monitoring, would also lie below this cultivation soil.

The watching brief was carried out in fair weather, with the full co-operation of site staff; the reliability of the results is therefore considered to be high.

8 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

Physical record

Finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the Oxfordshire County Museums Service under accession code OXCMS.2015.158.

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